

Improvement and Review Commission Minutes

Date: 18 June 2014

Time: 7.00 - 7.45 pm

PRESENT: Councillor R Gaffney (in the Chair)

Councillors K Ahmed, D H G Barnes, I Bates, G C Hall, A E Hill, Mrs J D Langley, Ms P L Lee, Mrs W J Mallen, J L Richards OBE, A Slater, T Snaith, R Wilson and Ms K S Wood

Standing Deputies: Councillors D A Anson MBE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D J Carroll, A Hussain and J A Savage.

Also present: A D Collingwood, Mahboob Hussain (Cabinet Member for HR, ICT & Customer Services) and R Metcalfe (Deputy Cabinet Member for HR, ICT & Customer Services).

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

2. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Improvement & Review Commission held on 2 April 2014, be approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

3. CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION

The Chairman welcomed everyone to this first meeting of the Improvement & Review Commission for the Council Year; his first on his reappointment as Chairman.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Mrs Langley for her excellent job as Chairman of the Commission for the last year and he was glad to have her invaluable support as his Vice Chairman.

4. PRESENTATION BY CABINET MEMBER FOR HR, ICT & CUSTOMER SERVICES

The Cabinet Member for HR (Human Resources), ICT (Information Communications Technology) and Customer Services outlined the work currently being carried out under the Portfolio; the main areas highlighted being the QVR14 Office Accommodation Rationalisation and the consideration of providers in respect of the ICT CSC Managed Services contract as from 1st February 2015.

The Cabinet Member outlined that organisational changes in recent years had reduced the Council's office accommodation requirements. Services and Member accommodation requirements could now be met in Buildings A & B, providing the opportunity to lease accommodation in Building C.

The Cabinet Member reported that the Council was in advanced discussions with an organisation for the occupation of the top floor of Building C for a term of up to 10 years. Based on the proposal for the top floor alone, the Council would achieve a payback on the investment required for works to Buildings A & B within 7 years, and so meet one of the original project parameters. Leasing remaining space in Building C would further reduce the payback period.

Members made a number of points, and received clarification on a number of queries as follows:

- The number of vacant office spaces in the Wycombe District was a worry in respect of letting out the other available floor of Building C, given that Building C was not recently refurbished. Whether any modernisation at WDC's expenses would be required to secure a 2nd tenant was open to question;
- Consideration of breaking the vacant floor into smaller units to secure a number of tenants would be considered;
- Improvements to the overall office environment were planned as part of the works to Buildings A & B and staff had been consulted at the outset and through the duration of the QVR 14 project.

The Cabinet Member reported that the Council's existing contracts for ICT & CSC services were due to expire in February 2015 and the Council was engaged in a procurement exercise for replacement managed service contracts.

The aim of the procurement exercise was to: -

- Deliver savings;
- Maintain (or improve) customer satisfaction;
- Be capable of flexing, to ensure that changes in services and/or the way services were delivered would result proportionately to changes in costs or fees; and
- Be resilient.

To achieve cost savings, the Council had used an affordability threshold. All Bidders had exceeded the affordability threshold.

Again in respect of Member queries and points made it was noted that:

- Under the 2015 contract a minimum saving of 17% against existing costs was required;
- Linking up the contract with those of neighbouring authorities Chiltern and South Bucks had been extensively explored, but had not proved possible;
- The note 'to maintain (or improve)' customer satisfaction under the contract featured in the report to the Commission was not an aside, as there was a genuine commitment from the providers to improve efficiency, achieve savings and increase customer satisfaction;
- A contract with an initial period of 5 years, with the possibility of 2, two year extensions had been offered in order attract competition whilst maintaining flexibility;and
- Services would continue to be provided under the existing contract until 31st January 2015. However, a transitional period had been provided which would allow for "soft" operation of the new services prior to first day of delivery on 1st February 2015.

The Cabinet Member was thanked for his comprehensive presentation on the work of the HR, ICT & Customer Services Portfolio.

5. SCOPING REPORT RE HOUSES IN MULTIPLE OCCUPATION TASK AND FINISH GROUP

Having at its last meeting (2nd April 2014) established a Task and Finish Group in respect of Houses in Multiple Occupation, the Commission now looked at the background and issues of the Group along with the draft Terms of Reference contained in the report before them. A proposed final report to the Commission from the Group in November 2014 was agreed.

The number of HMO's within the District was noted along with the Council's voluntary accreditation scheme in respect of private rented sector tenanted properties. The definition of Houses in Multiple Occupation under the mandatory licencing scheme; 'properties that are of three storeys or more and are let to five or more tenants' was noted, along with the fact that as a result the majority of Wycombe District's HMO's where therefore not subject to this scheme.

The Commission agreed with the draft terms of reference of the Group as featured in the report which focussed on provision, the effectiveness of the current policies

operated by the Council and investigation into the extension of licensing beyond that required by statute.

The importance of Houses in Multiple Occupation to High Wycombe as a vibrant university town was noted and would no doubt be fully explored by the Group during its work.

RESOLVED: That (i) the membership of the Commission's Houses in Multiple Occupation Task and Finish Group be noted and agreed; Councillors D H G Barnes (Chairman), I Bates, R B Colomb, A E Hill, Mrs W J Mallen, T Snaith and R Wilson; and

(ii) the following terms of reference be agreed and adopted;

- To establish the level of provision, in both quantity and quality, of Houses in Multiple Occupation within Wycombe District;
- To consider the current effectiveness of statutory legislation and voluntary codes utilised by Wycombe District Council in respect of HMO's and;
- To explore the benefits of the extension of licensing of HMO's beyond that required by statute, the cost effectiveness of such and whether this would result in better standards of provision.

6. FEEDBACK FROM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS ANALYSIS MEETING (Q4 AND YEAR END 2013-14)

The Chairman gave a verbal update on the recent meeting of the Chairmen and Vice Chairmen of the Improvement & Review Commission and Audit Committee in respect of Quarter 4 and Year End performance indicator analysis for 2013-14.

He pointed out that this group scrutinised the Council's performance indicator results in detail on a quarterly basis. As nothing in terms of service provision stood still, the Group was always looking for improvement and the Chairman had asked for the Group's notes to be included to keep Commission Members updated on its work.

7. SCRUTINY GUIDE - WYCOMBE DISTRICT COUNCIL

The recently amended Scrutiny Guide for Wycombe District Council as appended was noted. Members were urged to utilise both the Guidance for Councillor for Work Programme Suggestion and the Work Programme Suggestion Form

appended to the back of the Guide, when outlining topics for Scrutiny by the Commission and/or Task and Finish Groups.

The Chairman remarked that the Guide would prove a good summary of the work of the Commission and its Task and Finish Groups for any of the new Members of the Commission to read.

8. COMMISSION'S WORK PROGRAMME & FORWARD PLAN

The Commission had before it their current work programme and the Cabinet Forward Plan.

In respect of Task and Finish Groups the Chairman reminded Members of the standing Budget Task and Finish Group which started work each autumn in respect of the budget preparation for the next financial year.

Additionally Members were updated on the work of the Sports Centre Task and Finish Group, which was still awaiting a presentation by Buckinghamshire County Council officers on the traffic modelling implications of the development. This presentation would be given after the decision was taken on the proposed Daws Lea link, which was still with the relevant Cabinet Member at the County Council, following a call-in of that decision last year

The Meeting did not identify any additional issues from the Cabinet Forward Plan for specific scrutiny and noted the work programme of the Commission as appended.

RESOLVED: That:

- (i) No topics from the Cabinet Forward Plan currently require review by the Commission; and
- (ii) The Scrutiny Work Programme be noted.

9. COUNCILLOR CALL FOR ACTION

There were no Councillor Calls for Action.

Chairman

The following officers were in attendance at the meeting:

- Peter Druce - Democratic Services
- John McMillan - Head of HR, ICT & Customer Services
- Charles Meakings - Head of Democratic, Legal and Policy Services